Shortcomings in arrangements for haj pilgrims

2096. SHRI MUKHTIAR SINGH MALIK:
SHRIMATI RENUKA CHOWDHURY:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to the reports which appeared in the press that 2000 pilgrims could not go to Haj due to various shortcomings in the arrangements;

(b) if so, what are the details thereof and the reasons therefor; and

(c) what action have been taken against those who have been held responsible?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (PROF. K. K. TEWARI): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) (i) Some Haj pilgrims could not avail of the Haj charter flights on July 16 and 17, 1988 due to the confusion which prevailed in the Haj Camp Office at Delhi which is run by the Delhi Haj Committee on behalf of the Central Haj Committee.

(ii) On receiving reports that a few hundred Haj pilgrims were stranded in Delhi on 16/17 July, 1988 the last date for arrival of foreign pilgrims in Saudi Arabia by air, Government intervened in the matter and took the following action:

(1) Instructed on 17 July morning the Indian Ambassador in Saudi Arabia to request the Saudi authorities at the highest level to extend the time limit for charter flights;

(2) directed Air India to arrange special flights if the time limit was extended;

(3) As soon as the intimation of the Saudi Government's special permission to extend the limit for Indian pilgrims was received late on 18 July, all the concerned agencies worked vigorously with the result that 505 stranded pilgrims at Delhi reached Jeddah by the evening of 19 July and the early hours of 20 July.

(iii) According to reports received from the Central Haj Committee and the Delhi Haj Committee the shortcomings were due to the following reasons:—

(1) Saudi Airlines' delay in finalising the India-Jeddah leg of the charter flights which in turn led to last minute intimation of flights by the Central Haj Committee to concerned pilgrims;

(2) The Central Haj Committee's last minute request to Saudi Airlines to Postpone flights for July 10, 11 and 12 because of non-reporting by pilgrims in Delhi to subsequent days was not agreed to by Saudi Airlines. Consequently hundreds of pilgrims were stranded in Delhi after July 13th.

(3) The inexperience of the voluntary staff attached to the Haj Camp Office in Delhi who were unable to cope with the rush of work during the last week of the charter flights from Delhi; and

(4) the undesirable behaviour of some pilgrims who on July, 16th and 17th stormed into Haj Camp Office in Delhi, removed pilgrims' documents and prevented the local staff and the officials form the Central Haj Committee from carrying out their duties.

(c) After a detailed study of reports from the Central Haj Committee and the concerned State Haj Committees the Government will take necessary measures to ensure that such incidents do not recur during Haj 1989.